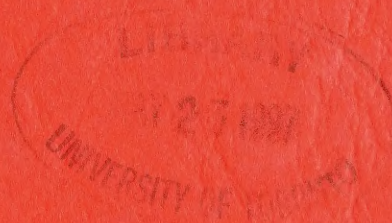


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HABITAT II AGENDA AND GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION


Key Achievements of
the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements
Habitat II



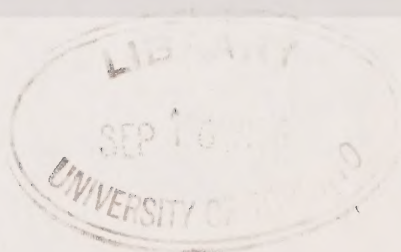
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Habitat II (the "City Summit") marked the culmination of a series of United Nations conferences aimed at setting an integrated global agenda to address key political, social, economic and environmental issues. The Conference concluded with the adoption of the Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action (GPA) to guide local, national and international efforts to achieve the conference's objectives: adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world. While the conference was characterized as the "City Summit", rural-urban linkages were well recognized, as was the need for development of intermediate cities and towns, rural areas, and communities generally. This was especially important given the rapid growth of "mega-cities". A key achievement was securing international recognition that shelter issues go beyond "bricks and mortar": community development with a priority given to human living standards.

Habitat I (Vancouver, 1976) was the first U.N. World Conference to address global shelter and human settlements issues. The outcomes of Habitat II reflect an evolution in global thinking and approaches from that which regarded government as the primary actor in addressing these issues to acceptance of the need for broad-based partnerships among governments, local authorities and all partners of civil society to achieve Habitat goals. Habitat II expressed this new vision by including, for the first time at a U.N. conference, a specific forum to enable direct dialogue between governments and representatives of major partners (local authorities, NGOs and other sectors of civil society) critical to a successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda and GPA. In addition, a "Best Practices" exhibit showcased policies, programmes and initiatives undertaken by cities, towns and communities around the world aimed at improving human settlements development and management.

Canada played a leading role in securing agreements on key issues addressed by Habitat II including "the right to adequate housing", the strengthening and improvement of shelter delivery systems, environmental protection, capacity building and enablement approaches, democratization and decentralization of governance structures, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and promotion and protection of human rights. Canada successfully introduced new sections to the Habitat Agenda and GPA on the issues of gender equality, indigenous people, youth, persons with disabilities, sustainable development and population.

Highlights of some of the major outcomes of Habitat II are summarized on the following pages with an emphasis on Canadian contributions.

Habitat II Agenda and Global Plan of Action (GPA): Key Achievements

● HOUSING/SHELTER

The Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action takes a comprehensive approach to shelter policy and recognizes the social, environmental and health impacts of housing. It recognizes that in many countries markets serve as the primary housing delivery mechanism and that actions should be undertaken to ensure that markets remain efficient and effective. The Agenda recommends decentralization of shelter policies and administration to sub-national and local levels. It also recognizes the importance of developing innovative housing finance mechanisms and extending credit to more households. Such mechanisms are particularly important if the financing needs of people having limited or no access to credit are to be addressed. Canada stressed the importance of maintaining, rehabilitating and renovating existing housing stock; the need for a range of tenure options, including home ownership, co-operative housing and rental tenure; the need for shelters for women victims of violence; and for special facilities for persons with disabilities.

● RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

One of the most important agreements reached at Habitat II was reaffirmation of the right to adequate housing as a human right recognized in international law. The "progressive realization of the right to adequate housing" includes protection from discrimination in housing and legal security of tenure. Canada's proposal served as the basis for negotiating the final agreement.

● SUSTAINABLE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

The Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action reaffirms that sustainable development incorporates economic and social development and environmental protection. The provisions related to sustainable human settlements are arguably the best ever achieved on environment and sustainable development applied at the community level. The document calls for new approaches and strategies to promote environmental protection. Canada successfully introduced language related to forests, land based sources of marine pollution, the preservation and restoration of aquatic ecosystems, and biodiversity. Canada also secured language on waste reduction, sewage disposal, the importance of sustainable transportation systems, and water resource management, which constitutes the so-called "brown agenda" for large urban centres. The importance of integrated land use strategies and sustainable forest management and agriculture were recognized as important goals for rural areas, while poverty reduction and social harmony were recognized as cross-cutting priorities for all human settlements. On cross-cutting principles, Canada secured agreement that the overarching objective for human settlements was sustainable development and that efforts to make our settlements more sustainable should be guided by the precautionary approach, the polluter pays principle, the pollution prevention principle, and the ecosystem approach.

● CAPACITY BUILDING AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This section recognizes that all sectors of civil society should be empowered to play an effective role in the planning and management of shelter and human settlements. Measures required to meet this challenge include: effective decentralization, the strengthening of local authorities and their associations (including training of local authorities on urban issues), the promotion of community consultative mechanisms, development of metropolitan guidelines to improve planning in urban areas, public-private partnerships to generate financial resources at all levels, and the use of information and communication technology to exchange and improve urban practices.

● GOOD GOVERNANCE

Transparency, responsiveness and accountability were identified as general principles which governments must strive to achieve in order to promote the development of sustainable human settlements. These principles, as well as popular participation and civic engagement, were also identified as necessary in order to prevent corruption and to ensure that resources are used to benefit all people.

● POPULATION

A Canadian-introduced section on population and sustainable development recognizes that population growth and movements must be taken into account in shelter and urban planning, in particular to take pressure off mega-cities. As population growth and distribution have an impact on development variables such as education, health, nutrition, the state of the environment and social and economic development, Canada stressed the importance of developing population databases and promoting public awareness on population issues.

● HEALTH

There was recognition that health problems related to poor environmental conditions, such as ineffective sanitation, inadequate water supplies and air pollution, as well as inadequate health services, inhibited the quality of life of citizens, aggravated social tensions and increased the vulnerability of people to the effects of disasters (whether natural or human-made). Governments should provide basic health services, including education and family planning.

● CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP

The need for responsible corporate behaviour and accountability was stressed, including socially and environmentally responsible corporate investment and reinvestment in local communities.

● UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The primacy of human rights and fundamental freedoms over cultural particularities was reinforced. Governments have an obligation to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Canada strongly supported the concept of universality.

● GENDER EQUALITY

Canada played a leading role in ensuring the Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action recognized that gender equality and the full and equal participation of women in political, social and economic life are essential to the attainment of sustainable human settlements. Examples of this recognition include language that addresses the importance of gender-disaggregated data, enhancing the safety of women, ensuring women's equal access to resources, including the right to inheritance and ownership of land, and the need to integrate gender perspectives in the development and implementation of policies, legislation and programmes related to the development of shelter and human settlements.

● VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

A Canadian priority was to ensure the appropriate characterization of those belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, as well as recognition that they have specific and various needs that must be addressed. The Habitat Agenda reflects an evolution in thinking regarding these groups since it focuses on the circumstances that result in vulnerability and disadvantage, and recognize the need to address their specific needs and circumstances in areas such as access to shelter, finance, basic social services, infrastructure and decision-making processes in order to ensure their full participation in society.

● INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

A Canadian-introduced section was adopted related to the needs and participation of indigenous people in shelter and urban development policies. Agreement was reached on the need to support the economic activities of indigenous people, ensuring their full participation in the elaboration and implementation of policies that affect their development, and with respect for their cultures, languages, and traditions.

● PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Habitat Agenda contains strong provisions on the need to create access for persons with disabilities, in particular by removing physical, economic, and attitudinal barriers and by integrating the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities in order to create access for all.

● OLDER PERSONS

Agreement was reached on the need to meet the evolving housing and mobility needs of older persons, thereby enabling them to continue to lead rewarding lives within their communities.

● YOUTH

Youth perspectives and realities were well integrated throughout the Habitat Agenda. Canadian-introduced language was adopted promoting employment programmes in partnership with youth, advocating the elimination of sexual and economic exploitation of young women and children, and calling for the enablement of young people to develop environmentally prudent ways of life and sustainable livelihoods.

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